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FREQUENT COMMUNION.

TRANSLATED FROM THE FRENCH OF THE
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LONDON:
BURNS & LAMBERT, 17 PORTMAN STREET,
AND 63 PATERNOSTER ROW.

LONDON :
PRINTED BY ROBSON, LEVY, AND FRANKLYN,
Great New Street and Fetter Lane.



It is hoped that these few pages, extracted from a larger work,* may assist some devout souls in aspiring to receive more frequently that Heavenly Bread which was designed by the Infinite Charity of our Divine Redeemer for the consolation and support of our earthly pilgrimage and the pledge of everlasting life hereafter.-

"He that eateth this Bread shall live for ever"
(St. John vi. 59).

* Manuel de l'Association de l'Adoration Perpétuelle, par le R. Père Boone, S.J.

**May the Divine Heart of Jesus in the Adorable
Sacrament of the Altar be praised, blessed, loved,
adored, and glorified every where and for ever.**

A.M.D.G.

ON FREQUENT COMMUNION.

“LET it be our greatest trouble to be deprived of this heavenly food” (St. Amb.).

Jesus Christ has an ardent desire to give Himself to us : **“With desire I have desired to eat this pasch with you” (Luke xxii. 15).**

He shows how strong this desire is by the great wonders He works to procure for us this heavenly food ; He invites us most pressingly to go to Him. **“Come,”** He says ; **“eat My bread, and drink the wine (changed into My blood) which I have mingled for you” (Pr. ix. 5).** He shows us the immense blessings attached to Holy Communion, and the wonderful effects of this Sacrament of Love. Jesus Christ, in whom are hid all the treasures of the wisdom and knowledge of God (Col. ii. 3), gives Himself entirely to us, to be **“the living bread” (John vi. 51),** to make us live by Him (John vi. 58), to make us partakers of

the Divine nature (2 Pet. i. 4), to heal all our spiritual diseases (Ps. cii.), and to secure to us the most desirable blessings. "All good things came to me together with her, and innumerable riches through her hands" (Wisd. vii. 8).

How happy I should be, if I could help to satisfy the heart of Jesus, and to inflame some souls with the most glowing desire to receive Him often, with the required dispositions, in the Communion!

I.

MOTIVES THAT URGE US TO FREQUENT COMMUNION.

First Motive: The Institution of the Blessed Eucharist.

1. That which proves that the design of the Son of God in instituting the Blessed Eucharist was that the faithful should often receive it, is "that He has given them this Sacrament," says St. Augustine, "as food." Our Divine Saviour has chosen the most common food,—that which we can least do without, that which nourishes the poor and the rich, little and great,—our daily bread, which we ask from God, and which is the chief support of life,—He has chosen it to change it into the unspeakable Sacrament of His Love.

2. Jesus Christ strongly urges us to make frequent use of this Divine food. From the tabernacle He speaks to us those affecting words: "*Come into My Sanctuary; be seated at My table; eat the bread that I have prepared for you: for My flesh is meat indeed, and My blood is drink indeed*" (John vi. 50).

3. He even wishes us to ask Him every day to be nourished with this mysterious bread. "For," say the Fathers, "the daily bread that He bids us ask for, in the prayer which He Himself has taught us, is not only the material bread which is to feed our bodies, but also the supersubstantial bread, the Eucharist, that is to keep our souls, and make them grow in grace." "We beg of God," says St. Cyprian, "to give us each day this heavenly bread, lest we who are in Jesus Christ, and who receive the Blessed Eucharist every day as the food of salvation, may be separated from this body by the obstacle of some more serious fault, which, keeping us from Communion, may deprive us of this heavenly food." St. Hilary speaks the same language: "*Give us this day our daily bread*; for what is there that God wishes so much as that Jesus Christ may dwell in us every day,—as He is the Bread of Life that came down from heaven? As we ask this every day, we also ask for Him to be given to us every

day." The words of the holy Doctor, quoted by the fourth Council of Toledo, leave nothing wanting. St. Ambrose thus confirms this doctrine: "If it is daily bread, why do you eat it only once a year, as is the custom of the Greeks in the East? Receive it every day, that it may be always doing you good. Let the Christian take comfort amidst the miseries of this life; let him even look upon those days as the happiest on which he has most to suffer; but let it be his greatest trouble to be deprived of the heavenly food of the Blessed Eucharist."

4. Finally, our Divine Redeemer has given us the Blessed Eucharist, that it might be a pledge of His Love, and might remind us of His Passion and Death: "*Do this in remembrance of Me. As often as you eat this bread and drink the chalice, you shall show the death of the Lord*" (1 Cor. xi. 24-26). Would it not therefore be a kind of ingratitude not to renew this sweet remembrance when we can? As there is nothing which honours the Lord so much as the celebration of the Passion of Jesus Christ in the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass, so we cannot honour God in a more worthy manner than by Holy Communion, which renews in us the remembrance of His Passion.

* In the time of St. Ambrose. It was not always so.

Ah, if we could understand the inestimable gift which Jesus Christ makes to us in the Holy Communion, what would not be our eagerness to receive it ! Jesus Christ, after having satisfied the multitude who had followed Him in the desert, said to those who surrounded Him : “ Labour not for the meat which perisheth, but for that which endureth unto life everlasting, which the Son of Man will give you ” (St. John vi.). It would, then, be deplorable to allow our soul to languish by not procuring for her often this Divine food : “ My heart is withered, because I forgot to eat my bread ” (Ps. ci.). How true, then, is that sentence of St. Cyprian, “ that a soul is without life, without strength, and without courage, when the Holy Eucharist does not vivify, sustain, and fortify her ” ! “ Without Me you can do nothing, ” said our Lord Jesus Christ (St. John xv.). Of ourselves we are incapable of having a good thought, but “ we can do all things in Him that strengtheneth us ” (Philip. iv.). Let us go, then, to Jesus, and let us go often to Him.

Second Motive : The Doctrine and Practice of the Church.

Practice followed at first the spirit of the institution of the Blessed Sacrament. The first Christians “ persevered in the communion of the breaking of

bread" (Acts ii.). They were all assiduously nourished with the Sacred Bread, sometimes in one house, and sometimes in another. The practice of daily Communion was in force in the first ages ; we see it by the testimony of St. Justin, Tertullian, St. Cyprian, and St. Jerome.

The Eastern Church thought the same as that of Africa and Rome. This discipline of antiquity is confirmed by the authority of the holy Council of Trent : " We remind you, with paternal affection," say the Fathers of the Council ; " we beg you ; we exhort you ; we conjure you, even by the bowels of the mercy of God, whoever you may be, who make profession of believing in Jesus Christ, that, remembering His infinite majesty, and the ineffable love which engaged Him to sacrifice Himself for our salvation, and to give us His Flesh for our nourishment, you should prepare yourselves to share from time to time in this sign of unity, this link of charity, this symbol of union and peace, which ought to reign among the faithful. Besides, have for these sacred mysteries of the Body and Blood of Jesus Christ a faith so firm and constant, a respect so profound, a devotion and piety so ardent and solid, that you may be able to receive frequently this Living Bread, which is above all substance ; in order that it may

be the truth, the life, and the perpetual health of your soul ; and that fortified by this celestial food you may pass from the pilgrimage of this miserable life to the abode of immortality, to feed there on the same Bread of Angels which we receive now under the sacramental species." The Catechism of the Council of Trent explains the wishes and desires of this holy Council.

" It is, then, the duty of pastors," it says, " to exhort the faithful not to neglect to nourish their souls *every day* with this Sacrament, as they deem it necessary to give their body every day the food of which it stands in need ; for spiritual nourishment is as necessary to the soul as natural nourishment is to the body. It will be very useful also to remind them at the same time of the infinite and Divine blessings which we receive by sacramental Communion, as we have shown above ; which may be confirmed again by the manna on which the Israelites were obliged to feed *every day*, in order to restore the strength of their bodies. Besides, such is the opinion of the holy Fathers, who recommend the frequent use of the Holy Eucharist in a lively and pressing manner."

Thus we see in the Acts of the Apostles, that the faithful communicated formerly every day. All those who at that time professed the Christian

faith were inflamed with such true and sincere charity, and were so continually occupied with prayer and good works, that they were disposed every day to receive the Sacrament of the Body of our Lord.

For a long time it was the custom in the Church, that the priest, having finished the Sacrifice and communicated, should turn towards the people, and invite the faithful to the sacred table by these words: "Come, my brethren, to Communion;" and then those who were disposed received the holy mysteries.

Pope Innocent XI., in his solemn decree of 1679, approves and praises frequent and daily Communion; and he wishes that all the faithful should be exhorted to it, as well as to the dispositions which it requires. This is the most interesting part of this decree, which is the basis of the actual discipline of the Church respecting Holy Communion, as Benedict XIV. has declared in his excellent treatise on the Diocesan Synod: "Although the frequent or daily use of the Holy Eucharist has always been approved by the holy Fathers in the Church, they have not, however, regulated or determined certain days to receive or abstain from it in every month or week. Neither has the holy Council of Trent done so;

but without ordaining any thing, out of regard to human weakness, it has indicated what it wishes and desires, and that with great wisdom. For the eye of man not being able to penetrate the folds of conscience, the embarrassment of distracting affairs, or the graces or gifts of God bestowed upon His children, we cannot ordain, or fix on the worthy disposition or purity of each one in particular, and consequently on frequent and daily Communion. It is for this reason that we must leave confessors, who sound the secrets of hearts, the care of prescribing on that subject, whether to tradesmen, married persons, and those who are not, what they shall think *good for their salvation, according to the profit they derive from frequent Communion, according to their progress in virtue, and the purity of their conscience.* The attention of Bishops should be directed above all not to alarm and keep souls at a distance, by a general prohibition of frequent and daily Communion, or by determining, in a general manner, the days for receiving it; but, on the contrary, to give permission themselves, or by pastors and confessors, to each person whom they shall judge worthy; and to provide that no one shall be deprived of the celestial banquet, whether he communicates frequently, or receives it every day;

and, nevertheless, let them take the greatest care that each one may taste the sweetness of the Body of the Lord either oftener or more seldom, *according to the measure of his devotion and his preparation.* It will be useful also that, besides the diligence of pastors and confessors, we should employ the assistance of preachers, in order that, when they shall excite and inflame all the faithful to frequent Communion, which they ought to do, *they may speak immediately of the great preparation which this Sacrament requires;* and let them teach in general those who with pious zeal feel drawn to frequent Communion, or to daily Communion, whether they are tradesmen, or married persons, or whoever they may be, that they ought to recognise their misery and unworthiness, in order that by a sense of the grandeur of the Sacrament, and fear of the judgment of God, they may know how to show the respect it merits to the celestial table at which they receive Jesus Christ; and that if they should sometimes feel less prepared, they should abstain from it, and dispose themselves better. But let the Bishops in whose dioceses this devotion towards the Most Holy Sacrament is practised thank God for it, and try to maintain it according to the rules of prudence; and let them bestow all their application and care, in

order that in the reception of the Lamb without stain no suspicion of scandal or irreverence is given, and that the virtues and gifts of God may be increased in those who receive it," &c.

Pope Benedict XIV., in a brief sent to the Bishops of Italy in 1742, expresses the ardent desire he has to see the fervour and daily Communion of the first ages revive again in the Church ; and he adds, that prelates, pastors, and confessors cannot employ their zeal and their labours better than in exciting amongst the faithful this fervour and desire of frequent Communion. It is also to engage us to frequent Communion that the Sovereign Pontiffs grant abundant indulgences.

"If worldly people ask you," said St. Francis of Sales, "why you communicate so often, tell them that it is to learn to love God ; to be purified from your imperfections ; to be delivered from your miseries ; to be consoled in your afflictions ; to be supported in your weakness. Tell them that two classes of persons ought to communicate often : the perfect, because, being well disposed, they would do very wrong not to approach the source and fountain of perfection ; and the imperfect, in order to be able to aspire justly to perfection ; the strong, in order that they may not become weak ; and the weak, that they may become strong ; the sick, to

be cured ; and the healthy, not to fall into sickness ; and that you, being imperfect, weak, and ill, have need to communicate often with your perfection, your strength, and your Doctor. Tell them that those who have not many worldly affairs ought to communicate often, because they have the opportunity ; and those who have many worldly affairs ought to communicate often, because they stand in need of it ; and that he who labours much ought also to partake of food that is solid, and frequently. Tell them that you receive the Holy Sacrament to learn how to receive it well, because we seldom perform an action well which we do not practise often. Communicate often, Philothea, and as often as you can, with the permission of your spiritual father : and believe me, hares become white in winter amongst our mountains, because they only see and feed on snow ; and by dint of adoring, and partaking of beauty, goodness, and purity, in this Divine Sacrament, you will become quite beautiful, holy, and pure."

Fénelon expresses himself in these terms, in speaking of daily Communion, or almost daily Communion : " The case in question is that of a faithful Christian whose conscience is pure, who lives a regular life, and is sincere and docile to a

director who has experience, and who is not too lax in practice. This faithful Christian is weak ; but he distrusts his weakness, and has recourse to the celestial nourishment to fortify himself. He is imperfect ; but he mourns over it, and labours to correct his imperfections. I assert, that a good director, to whom he is obedient with simplicity, ought to make him communicate nearly every day.

“ It is useless to object, that we see persons communicate who are unworthy of the Holy Communion. The question here is of pure, humble, docile, and recollected souls, who feel their imperfections, and wish to correct them by the heavenly food. Why should others be scandalised by seeing them communicate often ? Will they say to me that they are imperfect ? Ah ! it is to become perfect that they communicate. Does not St. Ambrose say, that *sin is our wound, and that our remedy is in the celestial and venerable Sacrament* ? If we were to wait to communicate every day until we were free from imperfections, we should wait for ever.

“ I acknowledge that a prudent and pious director may deprive a faithful Christian of Communion for a short time, either to prove his docility and humility, when he has some reason to doubt

it, or to preserve him from the snares of some illusion and secret attachment to himself; but these trials ought only to be made when there is real necessity, and ought to last a short time: we must have recourse, as soon as possible, to the nourishment of the soul.”*

“I know,” says St. Liguori, “that the opinions of Fathers of the spiritual life differ, more or less, on frequent Communion; as for me, I am of the opinion of those who recommend frequent Communion, for such appears to me also the sentiment of the holy Fathers, and of the Church, as the learned Father Petavius has proved.”†

II.

DISPOSITIONS FOR FREQUENT COMMUNION.

HAVING seen from the institution of the Divine Eucharist, and from the doctrine and practice of the Church, that frequent and daily Communion are very useful and desirable, let us consider attentively the *dispositions* which are required for Communion. This consideration is of the highest importance, in order not to fall into laxity, or favour abuse.

* Lettre sur la fréquente Communion.

† The Nun sanctified, ch. xviii. 3.

Since the holy Fathers desire for frequent and daily Communion higher dispositions than simple exemption from mortal sin ; since the holy Council of Trent wishes for them earnestly, without, however, defining any thing, or making a law regarding them ; and since Innocent XI. requires, without, however, defining them,—it is beyond doubt that this Communion requires more perfect dispositions than a less frequent Communion, unless the interest of him who communicates exacts the contrary.

Let us come to the proofs :

“ If we consider the Sacrament on the side of him who receives it,” says St. Thomas, “ as it requires *great devotion and great respect* in him who receives it, it is praiseworthy to receive it every day, if every day we have these dispositions. It is for this reason, St. Augustin says, *Live in such a manner that you may deserve to receive it every day.* But as several obstacles often happen which hinder this devotion by the indisposition of the body or of the soul, it is not useful to all to approach it every day, but only as often as each one finds himself disposed for it.” We shall soon see that it belongs to the confessor to be the judge of these dispositions.

The holy Council of Trent also desires that we should bring to frequent Communion *a firm*

and constant faith, a profound respect, and a solid piety and devotion.

Let us listen to the pious and learned Salmeron :

“If any one can prepare himself every day, he would do well to communicate every day, if he sees that *hatred of sin, love of virtue, and devotion, increase in him by this frequent Communion; to him, then, who by the frequentation of the Sacrament conceives a detestation of his sins, a contempt of the world, a desire of our heavenly country, and who remarks in himself the weakening of the passions, and a greater strength of the spirit against the flesh, it would be useful for him to communicate every day. . . . And any one who should judge that such a person, who draws such great fruit from daily Communion, does wrong, would not commit a small fault.*”

The venerable Louis de Ponte, so experienced a master in the path of perfection, gives also on this subject still more precise rules. His second rule is expressed in these terms: “There may be some persons of such eminent virtue, and who desire so ardently to receive the Divine Eucharist, that we ought to allow it to them three or four times a week, even to some few every day, if those persons are entirely devoted to the service of God,

and disengaged from the ties of marriage, and from the occupations of the world."

He continues: "If necessity, and extraordinary hunger suffice for granting an extraordinary Communion to one who has the habit of communicating every week, we can allow him a more frequent habitual Communion, *if this great spiritual hunger is habitual and ordinary, and if his life is excellent*; and since this bread is *daily*, we must believe that there are still, in our days, in the Church of God some persons to whom we may grant such frequent Communion; and as in the primitive Church the Apostles allowed it every day to a great number of the faithful, we may believe also that there is a small number in our days to whom it is granted with reason, since the hand of the Lord is not shortened, and the Blood of Jesus Christ has not grown so cold that it cannot enkindle the hearts of some of the faithful, as it once enkindled the hearts of a great number."*

"The disposition which such frequent Communion requires *being exquisite*," said St. Francis of Sales, "it is not well to advise it to all; and because this disposition may be found in many virtuous souls, it is not well either to withdraw or dissuade in general any one from it.

* De Christiani hominis perfectione, tract. iv.

“For daily Communion, we must not only be without any affection for venial sin, but we must have purified our souls from all bad inclinations; and it should be by the advice of our spiritual father.”*

We have seen how favourable Pope Innocent XI. is to frequent Communion and daily Communion. As to the *dispositions*, “he leaves confessors to prescribe on that subject what they may think useful for the salvation of their penitents, according to the profit which they draw from frequent Communion, according to their progress in virtue, and the purity of their conscience, and according to the measure of their preparation.”† In all this decree the Pontiff inculcates the *great preparation which the Holy Sacrament requires*.

“As for daily Communion,” says Bossuet, “it is the object of the Church’s wish, in the Council of Trent, and one of the fruits of the petition which we make in the Lord’s Prayer, when we ask for our daily bread. But, at the same time, it is certain that it is not a favour to be made common, and we can only attain to it after long precautions and preparations; and when we see that the thing tends so manifestly to general edifica-

* Introd. à la Vie dévote, ch. xx.

† Decret. de 1679.

tion, that there is reason to believe that God will be glorified by it."

Benedict XIV., who expresses the ardent desire he has to see the fervour and the daily Communion of the first ages revive in the Church, manifests at the same time the dispositions which he requires. "May it please God," he exclaims, "*that we should see the faithful in our days inflamed with the same ardour as the Christians of the first ages; hasten with eagerness to the holy table; assist not only at the Sacred Mysteries, but also ask with love and respect to participate therein. Certainly there is nothing on earth in which bishops, pastors, and confessors may more usefully employ all their zeal than in leading the faithful to a purity which renders them worthy of frequent Communion.*"

He recommends confessors not to advise or permit frequent communion to those who often fall into mortal sins, and who do not endeavour to refrain from them by sincere repentance; nor to those who, avoiding mortal sins, have, however, an affection for venial sins which they do not wish to correct.

"It is an error," says St. Liguori, "to grant frequent Communion to those who have venial sins for which they have an affection, and which

they do not wish to correct. It is proper to permit it to persons who without this Communion would be in danger of falling into mortal sins."

"As for me," he says elsewhere, "I should have a difficulty in granting frequent Communion to a person who wished to persevere in a defect which, without being clearly a venial sin, would be an obstacle to his perfection, and denote little humility or obedience. . . ."

"When the soul has attained a certain degree of perfection; when she spends some time in prayer; and, besides (as St. Francis of Sales says), when she has repressed the greater part of her evil inclinations,—she may communicate every day, for that is, according to St. Prosper, the only perfection to which human weakness can attain."

After having quoted the opinion of theologians on frequent and daily Communion, the same holy Doctor concludes: "For the rest, considering the opinion of these authors, it appears that a director cannot refuse without scruple, frequent and even daily Communion (with the exception of one day in the week, according to the practice of some prudent guides, and with the exception also of a time in which penitents are deprived of it, to try their humility, their obedience, or for other legitimate motives) to souls who *desire it to advance in*

Divine Love, when they are free from all affection to venial sin ; when they apply themselves much to mental prayer ; when they endeavour to tend towards perfection ; and when they no longer fall into deliberate venial sins."

If we were to follow exactly in practice what Popes, councils, theologians, and masters of spiritual life require, we should equally avoid excessive rigour and still greater facility. Jesus Christ would be more honoured and loved, and the Church of God would be more consoled and edified, because the result would be more solid and abundant.

"May it please God," exclaims St. Alphonso de Liguori, "that we find in the world a great number of souls who, *detesting even the slightest faults*, ask to communicate, not only frequently, but even every day, with a true desire of amending their lives and advancing in the love of God. If it were thus, Jesus Christ would be much more honoured and loved on earth." The "Imitation" says, "Oh, how happy and agreeable to God is he who *lives in such a manner*, and preserves himself *in such purity of conscience*, that he is disposed to communicate even every day, and would desire it, if he had permission, and if he could do it without being remarked too much !"

III.

EXCUSES ALLEGED FOR REFRAINING FROM THE
HOLY COMMUNION.

Two classes of Christians find excuses for withdrawing from the holy table: the virtuous, who have a timid conscience, and who fear to communicate too often, from a spirit of humility and respect for the infinite majesty of God contained in the Holy Eucharist; and the tepid, who deprive their souls of Holy Communion, because they will not rise from their state of apathy and spiritual indolence, or make the sacrifices which the Lord requires of them. We will speak here especially of the first.

1. Virtuous and too timid souls judge themselves unworthy to receive so often within them a God so great, who is purity and sanctity itself. We reply at once, that he who is not worthy to communicate often will not be more worthy if he communicate seldom, since delay only serves in general to render him more and more tepid. It is in this sense that St. Ambrose said: "He who does not deserve to communicate every day, does not merit it at the end of the year."* Then St.

* Lib. v. de Sacram. c. x.

Thomas says, "To speak plainly, it is better to approach the holy table with humility than to refrain from it." Love is more perfect than fear.

2. I know that there have been great saints who have seldom communicated, who abstained from it through humility or fear; but they are not to be imitated. God conducts us in different ways: the ordinary road is the frequentation of the Sacraments.

If there have been some great saints who communicated seldom, there have also been a very large number of great saints who communicated very often.

In the *Canonisation of Saints* the Church looks on frequent Communion as a very favourable sign.

"In this Sacrament," says St. Thomas, "two things are required: the desire of uniting ourselves to Jesus Christ, which produces love; and respect for the Holy Sacrament, which belongs to the gift of fear. The first excites to frequent Communion; the second withdraws from it. If any one remarks from experience that the fervour of his love increases by daily Communion, and that his respect does not diminish, he ought to communicate every day; if he should remark the contrary, he ought then to refrain *sometimes* from Communion, in order to approach it with more

respect and devotion." "Let each one follow in that particular," says St. Augustine, "what his conscience directs him to do." Let us follow the rule fixed by the Sacred Congregation, approved by Innocent XI., namely, that the approaching more or less frequently to Communion ought to be left to the judgment of the confessor, who will direct his penitents in that particular according to the profit which he knows by experience that they derive from it; for the *true mark that we communicate well*, says the Venerable Master Avila, *is the profit of the soul*. Of ourselves we are always unworthy to receive often our Lord in the Holy Communion; but this good Saviour deigns to prepare us Himself by His grace, especially in the Holy Sacrament of Penance.*

3. If even we do not feel within us a great desire for Holy Communion, if we experience, on the contrary, a painful dryness; let us not withdraw from it for that reason; many of the saints were for a long time subjected to these severe trials, and deprived of all sensible consolation, and notwithstanding they continued to communicate often. In receiving Jesus Christ within us, although in a state of dryness, we do not learn the less to live with His own life, to detach ourselves

*. Instruction sur la Confession de Dévotion.

more and more from ourselves, and to withdraw from all that may displease our Divine Saviour.

4. Let us not fear that frequent Communion may diminish the respect and love which we owe to our Lord in the Holy Eucharist. The more a soul converses with her God, the more she knows Him, and the more respect and love she has for Him. This is what happened to the Samaritan woman. At first, when Jesus Christ spoke to her, she took Him for an ordinary man ; afterwards she called Him successively Master, Prophet,—and at last she recognised Him as the Messiah : in the same manner, the oftener a soul communicates, the more she knows the goodness and love of her God ; and thus each Communion that she makes disposes her to make the following Communion with greater faith, fervour, and devotion. This familiarity does not occasion contempt, therefore, as would be the case amongst men, in whom we discover always some weakness.

5. Without doubt, frequent Communion requires that we labour generously to free ourselves from our faults ; but we must distinguish here two kinds of faults : some are committed with perfect knowledge and full deliberation ; and those persons who desire to please Jesus Christ, and who communicate often, avoid them as much as it is

in their power to do ; others are an effect of human weakness and frailty. No one can be exempt from this description of faults without a particular privilege ; and we all have need to say every day, " Lord, forgive us our trespasses." God so permits it, in order to make us know our misery and the need we have of His grace. Not only should these faults not prevent us from communicating often ; but they ought to be, on the contrary, an additional motive to engage us to frequent Communion, which is, according to the doctrine of the Holy Fathers and of the Council of Trent, " the antidote which preserves us from mortal sin, and the remedy of our daily faults." " We see," says Fénelon, " that the Christians of the early ages, who communicated every day, were still evidently imperfect. Before we approach the holy table, let us humble ourselves profoundly before Jesus Christ ; and let us say with St. Augustine, " Come, O Lord, take entire possession of my soul : come to dwell alone in her ; come to reign alone over her. It is true that this soul is not adorned in a sufficient manner to receive you ; but come, O Lord, you shall be yourself its ornament."

6. There are timid souls who complain of finding themselves always the same, of not cor-

recting themselves, and of discovering continually new and great defects within them. I reply at first, if souls do not receive from frequent Communion all the fruit which they should derive from it, it is because they do not prepare sufficiently for it, or that they fall into *voluntary* venial sins, which prevent Holy Communion from producing abundant fruit. I reply in the second place, that not to feel the effects of Holy Communion is not a sign that we do not really derive benefit from it. It may happen that a soul which does not perceive it receives its fruit in abundance; and it is often very useful to her that she does not know it;—it is the means of keeping her always in the bounds of humility. It happens often that those who felt great consolations in the beginning of their conversion feel them no longer, or very seldom afterwards; sometimes even they are entirely deprived of them. “We water trees often,” says St. Gregory, “when they are young, to make them grow; but when they have taken deep root, we cease to water them.” “As corporal nourishment fortifies us,” says St. Laurence Justinian, “although we do not feel it, in the same manner the Holy Eucharist nourishes our souls, although we do not remark it.” This Divine Sacrament operates sometimes in such a hidden

manner, that the soul does not perceive her progress during many years. \

In short, it is a good sign when a soul discovers always in herself new defects, new imperfections ; it is a proof that she is more and more enlightened by the Divine light, which teaches her to know herself better.

“ As to a soul in a state of trial,” says Bossuet,* “ exhort her to Holy Communion ; tell her not to be uneasy on account of her dryness ; let her consider only that the invisible Workman knows how to act without appearing to do so ; and that all consists in abandoning secretly our hearts to Him to do with them what He thinks best, and never to lose confidence, or the regularity of our accustomed exercises of prayer and Communion, without any regard to the sweetness or desolation we find in them, but with firm faith in their efficacy. It is not by consolation, and still less by reason, or by any effort, that she will be supported ; it is by simple, obscure, and naked faith, by which, placing herself in the arms of God, she abandons herself to His will, by ‘ hoping against hope,’ as St. Paul says. I give it to her as a guide in a path of darkness ; and it is giving her the same guide which conducted Abraham during the whole of

* Tract 29, *Lettres de Piété*.

his pilgrimage. Let her, then, communicate in that faith, without hesitating; and let her do every thing in the same manner, without making any effort to change her state; for she ought to be persuaded that the more God plunges her in the abyss, the more He will sustain her secretly by the hand. There is no time to give Him, no limit to prescribe for Him. When she can bear it no longer, there will certainly appear a little ray of consolation which will afford her support.

“There are violent efforts which we must not make in certain states, because they tend to impatience and bitterness; and there is no need of violence when God takes possession of the heart by sweetness.”

ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS REGARDING FREQUENT COMMUNION.*

“*First Question.* When virtuous souls propose certain difficulties, which they think should prevent them from communicating, can I re-assure them? These are doubts against faith, temptations to blasphemy, or else disgust towards the Blessed Sacrament, of which they think them-

* Bossuet, *Lettres de Piété.* .

selves unworthy. Shall I not give an account to God of the communions which I am the cause of their making, having no authority, but only liberty, as among friends ?

“*Answer.* In cases of doubt, always advise Communion to those whom you see to have a good will : I take on myself, without hesitation, the advice which you give on that point. Holy Communion is the true remedy for these temptations ; and if we pay attention to disquietude, we show the devil what he has to do in order to draw us away from Jesus Christ.

“*Second Question.* In these states of desolation and dryness, ought we to communicate so often ?

“*Answer.* Far from fearing Communion in these states, it is the time to desire it, and to practise it more ; for it only belongs to ‘*Him who is*’ to vivify our nothingness and draw us from it. Say, then, to this Beloved Spouse : ‘Thou art all, and I am nothing ; make me to be what Thou wishest that I should be ; and if it be Thy will to conceal from me that it is the work of Thy hand, may Thy will be accomplished.’ Reflections and consolations will sensibly arise of themselves from these dispositions ; but they are not necessary ; faith suffices. In dryness and obscurity, say the Creed and the Pater, and believe that all will go

well, however dryly you may say them, without tormenting yourself to repeat them, nor even to finish them, if the Holy Spirit invite you elsewhere ; for He must be entirely free ; and when He is content with the *will*, it often pleases Him not to bestow the entire fulfilment that our devotion would desire.

“ *Third Question.* I have always some trouble on the subject of my frequent Communions from the little progress I make ; and I fear that the great desire I feel to approach the holy table may be a delusion of the enemy.

“ *Answer.* Progress is not always perceived. There is some profit in not falling lower. I do not include mortal sin among these falls ; and I speak in favour of those who lead a virtuous and religious life. You ought to go to Communion, as it pleases Jesus Christ to urge you to it ; sometimes as a criminal ; sometimes as a spouse ; sometimes as a beast, as David said ;* in a word, either from inclination or by force, according to that text, ‘ *Constrain her to enter,*’† provided that Jesus Christ sees you in a wedding garment. . . . If frequent faults should make us withdraw from Communion, and even from prayer, it would prove that we hoped in ourselves, and not in the good-

* Ps. lxxii.

† Luke xiv.

ness of God. Never refrain from prayer or Communion for any reason whatever, unless by the command of an enlightened confessor.”*

We have just seen that every thing engages us to communicate often : the most ardent desire of Jesus Christ in instituting the Divine Eucharist ; the example of the first Christians ; the doctrine and practice of the Church,—all engage us to communicate often ; but, at the same time, every thing speaks to us of the dispositions which are required to communicate often with fruit.

We have seen how the different pretexts disappear which are brought forward by too great fear and cowardice. Let us go, then,—let us often go to receive the source of every good ; and *let our greatest sorrow be to be deprived of this heavenly food.* (St. Amb.)

IV.

HOW THE HOLY COMMUNION OPERATES IN SOULS,
AND PARTICULARLY IN SOULS WHICH ARE IN
THE GREATEST DESOLATION.

It would be desirable, if possible, to express the Adorable Sacrifice which Jesus Christ our Lord

* These rules, and this advice, are only addressed to pious and timorous persons.

offers in the soul at the time of Holy Communion, to speak of what passes in the inmost interior of that soul, and of the dispositions she ought to have, in order not to oppose this precious mystery which is operated in her in so Divine a manner. We should for that purpose be introduced into the interior Sanctuary, in which the God of Majesty resides, and in which He works the prodigious effects of His ineffable union with the soul. My belief is, that there are mysteries which take place in Holy Communion of which souls that communicate are yet in ignorance.

If we must speak of the necessary preparation, I admit that we must make the best in our power ; that we must exhort souls who are beginning an interior life to dispose themselves for it ; but if we are permitted to reason on what we can do,—what are our dispositions, our desires, our fervour worth ? Alas, let us admit that they are very little worthy of the purity and holiness of Jesus Christ. Indeed, who are we to appear before His Infinite Greatness ? As for me, I believe that the best thing we can do is to humble ourselves ; to cast ourselves down into the depths of our nothingness ; to acknowledge it by faith, if we cannot by feeling ; and to keep at an infinite distance, if that were possible, from this Supreme

Majesty. My opinion is, that the soul ought to retire, as it were, into her own unworthiness, and (as if not daring to appear on account of her sinfulness) she should remain thus lost in her nothingness, whilst Jesus Christ enters within her, and descends there like a sovereign in His own dominions, to whom every thing belongs, and in whose presence every one must retire to give place to Him. What does retiring into ourselves mean? It is, that the mind bows down; confounds itself; acknowledges its nothingness and unworthiness; and the senses dare not approach this August Majesty. What grieves us in our communions is, that the mind and the senses are not satiated in them; that their taste is not satisfied; that it seems no festival for them; that they are not introduced to the banquet; that, in general, the mind perceives nothing, and the senses remain in a state of aridity. This is wonderful, though painful to bear; the soul which has only lived a life of sensibility and sensuality knows not as yet what the Divine life is that Jesus Christ communicates to her by the Holy Eucharist; and as this Divine nourishment is not sensibly felt, the soul persuades herself that it ought to have a celestial taste, and that she should experience it, in order to enjoy the delights which it contains in

itself, and which so many virtuous souls have enjoyed in the Holy Communion.

It is true that there are souls who communicate sweetly, and with pleasure, although they have scarcely done or suffered any thing yet for Jesus Christ; these are souls of unsullied innocence, which causes them to enjoy some passing delights, which have no effect perhaps than that of preserving them from some great crime; or they are souls who can only serve God in the time of consolation, without which they would not attach themselves to His love, like sinners. Such as these are mercenary soldiers; they march for the sake of reward.

But there is a third class; these are souls purified in the furnace of the most rigorous ways of God by sufferings and excessive temptations. After these trials Jesus Christ shows Himself again in their interior, and imparts there the most unutterable delights; but, alas, before that point is attained, how many frightful deaths, what long agonies and cruel sufferings!

Those whom God has raised from the dead may well live the life of Jesus Christ; but do you

fire which should purify them by extreme poverty, unjust treatment, &c.

Let us leave these souls of consummate virtue to speak of a more ordinary state in which the generality of souls stand still.

They complain and torment themselves because they do nothing in Holy Communion, and because they do not profit by so great a grace. If you ask them the reason, they are ignorant of it. "I go to confession," they say; "I do partly what I can, and I am nevertheless very miserable." I should like to divide into different degrees these souls that suffer in the Holy Communion; and, to say the truth, there would be as many different states as there are persons who communicate. Some are deprived of consolation by daily infidelities, which they do not take care to correct; others are in spiritual poverty, from ignorance, and will not take the trouble to read, to store their minds with good thoughts, and keep it occupied; for we must remark a very important thing in order to communicate well: it is necessary that the soul should do all she can on her side to preserve herself not only from mortal sin, but also from wilful venial sin, and exert herself to root out her evil habits of pride, vanity, &c. It is necessary that she should try to preserve re-

collection during the day; be faithful to her regular exercises; and not fail, when she has an opportunity, to practise solid virtue.

I come now to the Holy Communion, in which souls complain of their dryness, poverty, and incapacity, not knowing what to do with their mind, their memory, their will, and, above all, their senses, which groan mournfully, which suggest temptations, and produce innumerable fearful thoughts of every kind, and often of despair and reprobation. What advice shall we give to these desolate souls? Oh, how easy it would be to satisfy them, if they would have a little docility of mind to believe what we tell them in their troubles! I do not doubt (although it may not be on the first or second day) that they would find marvellous graces hidden in the depths of their poverty and extremity. Oh, if they would neglect themselves in this situation; withdraw at a distance from themselves, not by violence, but by patience; and try to let these extravagant thoughts, impressions, and fearful temptations

amining any thing. But you will say, "I cannot; I am as it were forced to occupy myself with it, without being able to separate myself from it." I am ready to believe that you cannot prevent hearing the cries, seeing the malice, feeling the tyranny of these temptations; very well, that is a subject for patience; you do not attend to them voluntarily. It appears, you reply, that my will is chained to them; that it is pleased with them; that it yields to sin; and that I am only an abomination. I grant that your will appears to be engaged; but know that you have two wills,—the superior and the inferior,—which we call appetite, and which is only well distinguished from the other by souls who possess themselves in peace; others must have patience, and believe simply what they are told. Oh, if they could only know the great evil which they commit in not submitting their mind and judgment to the judgment of their director, they would rather die than fail in it! They must, then, simply abandon themselves; and when the tempest is so violent that all seems wrecked and lost, they must in some degree find repose in their own loss.

But let us pass on farther, and express what our Lord does in a poor and desolate soul, which has no entrance to the royal chamber, nor any

This is the Mystery of mysteries. Jesus Christ enters into the soul by Holy Communion, without having need of the soul to prepare His abode, or to open the interior Sanctuary into which He retires. I know that, on entering our hearts, He passes into that sacred temple of the most intimate portion of ourselves, in which He renews His adorable Mysteries, and principally that of sacrifice. Jesus unites Himself to us by the Divine Eucharist, and, according to the opinion of the Fathers, we become one thing with Him. This union astonishes all the Church, which cannot understand or admire it sufficiently. Now, I ask you, when you communicate, is it *you* who produce this union and transformation? No, certainly; it is Jesus, by the virtue of this Divine Sacrament: it suffices, on your part, that you are in a state of grace; and the rest is done by the Infinite Love of Jesus Christ. As that is true and of faith, why are not souls taught how they should act, and what they have to do in this

and be assured of it, they must only keep themselves in recollection, if it is possible, and simply consent to all that passes within them by the Divine and personal virtue of Jesus Christ; and, if they cannot preserve themselves in peace, or have any respect or attention, let them say with all their hearts with the Church, several times, *Amen*. This word is very mysterious; it is an avowal and a consent which the soul gives to all that God does in the Church, and all that the Church does for God. It is well to repeat it often with this intention, since it is for that reason that the Church orders it to be repeated so many times. What becomes, then, of this soul in Holy Communion? She transforms herself in Jesus Christ. But I see nothing of it; I feel nothing; I experience nothing. No; because this transformation is made in your soul; and you can neither see nor taste this transformation, or this Divine operation, if God does not reveal it to you, as I know that He has revealed it to some persons. But, although you do not see it or feel it, it is not the less true: you must believe it; and it is the happiness of the soul to preserve that faith, and live in ignorance, in order to have a more profound submission to these incomprehensible mysteries. Jesus Christ being, then, in the soul, what does He do, and

where does He retire ? I have said before, into the interior Sanctuary of the soul, which is its most intimate portion, and serves as a temple to this Great High Priest, and as an altar to celebrate His Divine and awful Sacrifice of Himself to His Father,—a sacrifice which He is pleased to renew in the interior of this soul, as in a sacred temple which He sanctified on the day of her baptism. Oh, inconceivable wonder ! Jesus Christ descends into our souls to immolate Himself there,—to celebrate His solemn Mass, though in profound silence. All is calm in this temple ; the angels and saints admire and adore therein the humiliations of Jesus Christ ; and the Eternal Father reposes His Divine complacency in them. But how does this sacrifice benefit the soul ? By sacrificing herself, because, being united with Jesus Christ, she cannot be separated from Him, and consequently she is immolated with Him and by Him in this temple ; and she forms a part of His sacrifice, which she could never do so perfectly as by the Holy Communion. Behold, then, an admir-

Christ. And as the Eternal Father receives Him with infinite satisfaction, we may say that He receives also the soul united to Jesus Christ, since there is no separation between Jesus Christ and her. This truth being supposed, why should you torment yourself so much because you do nothing at Holy Communion? Truly, does all that you can do approach to what Jesus Christ performs there for you? You have only, then, to unite yourself to Him, to consent, to adore Him in a few respectful words, and submit yourself to Him. Oh, if the soul knew the benefit which she receives from it, the Holy Communion would be agreeable to her at all times, since she would be convinced that it is a mystery which operates in her, almost without her, and that all is done there by Jesus Christ. If we could accustom ourselves to this holy practice, the soul would receive admirable effects from this sacrifice; she would feel I know not what Divine strength, which would withdraw her from herself, from creatures, and imperfections.

It would be well to show here the structure of that mysterious Temple in which Jesus and the soul form one and the same sacrifice and oblation, but I should never end; it suffices to prove that a soul which by the grace of God is free from

mortal sin participates with Jesus Christ in this manner; as to those whose lives are still more pure, they receive from it, without doubt, still more admirable effects.

We must observe two or three things regarding what we have said in order to prevent the disorder which it might occasion in some unmortified souls; they would say perhaps that if Jesus performs alone this Divine transformation, they have no need to keep their minds recollected, or to give themselves any trouble to prepare for Holy Communion. We must know, therefore, that this Divine operation requires a faithful correspondence, a continual vigilance to live in the purity and holiness of so great a favour and grace, and consequently a faithful practice of mortification and self-denial, otherwise this wonderful favour will not operate in us the sanctification which is natural to it, and which Jesus Christ desires as the effect of this adorable Sacrament. It is not, then, sufficient to be united in this way to Jesus Christ; we must show the effects of this union by the practice of the virtues of patience, obedience,

respect for the greatness of God ; and although this respect does not strike the senses, it does not fail to produce its effect. It adores ; for if you pay attention to the intimate motions of this recollection, all the interior of the soul is united to God. But when the poor soul is troubled with temptations and sufferings, she is not capable of discerning it, and thinks that she does nothing but lose time or dishonour the Infinite Majesty of God. It is just that souls who abound in pious sentiments should utter them before the throne of the Lord ; but let those who are dry, poor, blind, and powerless, follow simply what is advised for them above ; its practice will be very useful to them. Let them abandon themselves to Jesus who operates in them, who sacrifices the soul with Him ; let them content themselves with adhering simply to what He does in them, and by degrees the soul that practises it, without being attached to her own ideas, will find a change in her interior, more calm and clearness, although this exercise appears to obscure the understanding by holding it in captivity, and preventing it from tormenting itself to see and to comprehend. It is far better to be enlightened by the light of this Divine Sun than by our own intelligence, which is subject to error and falsehood.